

# the practice of m3architecture

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# the practice of m3architecture

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Architecture.

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#### Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Michael Lavery

date: 26 March 2010



Leon,  
for the invitation in the first instance,  
for the buoyancy you provide and the critique you facilitate,  
for making us a part of the “community of learning”, and the  
generosity and care surrounding educating in this way,  
  
thankyou.

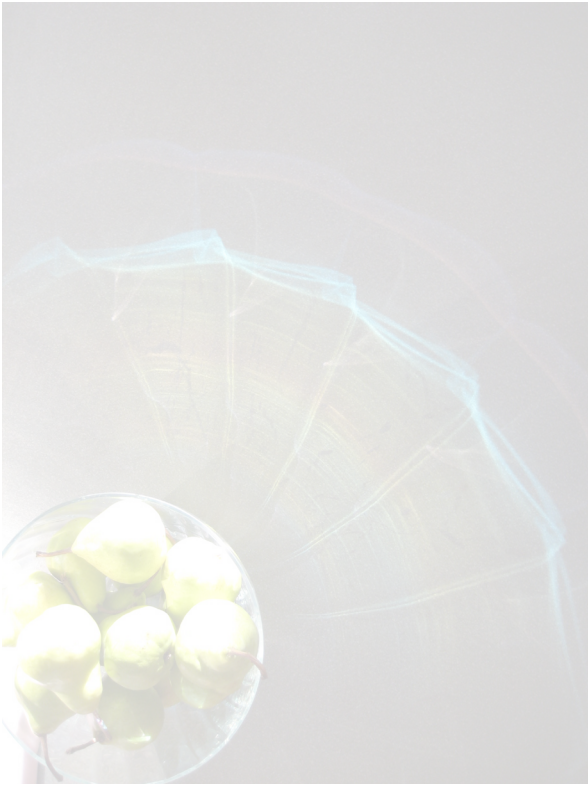
Leon, Richard and Martyn,  
for attending our grc's with such frequency and enthusiasm,  
for your clear and consistent critique and feedback,  
for enabling us to better understand ourselves, as we  
continue our practice in architecture,  
  
thankyou.

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## PERSONAL STATEMENT

Clarity is always welcome, if only to acknowledge what exactly is obscuring the view.

A chance to put the extended professional workings of m3architecture and my own ways under the RMIT microscope was quite simply an opportunity too interesting to say no to.

Identifying where exactly value resides in a given situation is one of the roles we undertake for our clients, whether they like it or not. Turning that critical eye on ourselves promised to be at least entertaining, if not informative. As it has transpired making the examination and communication of 'm3architecture' subject to the process, themes and techniques of a typical office project has proved nothing short of illuminating, if not entertaining.

Through this course of study and reflection I have observed more acutely in each of my partners a capacity to variously: support, encourage, chastise and lead, within and for the group when required. The dynamics of the group is such that while it is possible and important to identify specific areas of interest for each of us, the truth for me is that the moderating and supportive influence of the group on these individual traits emerges again and again as pivotal. It is appropriate therefore to thank my business partners (Ben Vielle, Michael Christensen and Michael Banney) for the generosity of spirit and strength of character that allows us to engage with each other and with the work, in this way. This journey, measured in late nights and years, has first and foremost reinforced for me the notion that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of the parts. There is also now, greater clarity in how those parts work together.

Architecture can be understood as an enabling discipline. m3architecture's themes and techniques, better understood, refined and presented here as part of this process are tools for this enabling. My own interest in the capacity and the ways that the built object can actively engage (enable) the individual is also better understood. (refer chapter 3) With these outcomes RMIT's masters programme shows itself as an example of an enabling architecture.

The invitation to partake in this programme came with an invitation into a broader RMIT community. Most notable amongst the large number of those who have shown their support shared their considerable insights are: Professor Leon van Schaik (AO), Professor Richard Blythe, (Richard's partners at Terroir) and Doctor Martyn Hook (and Martyn's partners at Iredale Petersen Hook). In particular their trust in both the process and in m3architecture as a collective has been formative. Like so many who have been here before us this seems a debt we can only repay by continuing our work and by supporting those who come after us.



## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

In embarking on research into the practice of m3architecture various abstract analytical tools were used as summarised in Chapter 1. What emerged was a way of capturing the territory between thinking and building in a series of posters, illustrated in Chapter 2. These in effect became m3architecture projects in their own right, and will form the substance of the forthcoming exhibition.

Although the central focus of this research is on the work of the group, Chapter 3 contains personal reflections. The intention of this portion is to provide additional colour to the complexion of practice established through Chapters 1 and 2.

The Appendix is a catalogue of the projects referred to frequently through the course of the research.

The document provides readers with several ways to understand the practice of m3architecture. Through the search for a voice, the struggle and uncertainty common in the process of practice can be felt. Then, through the projects themselves, a sense of the physical results of practice can be seen. The individual reflections bring readers closer to personal imperatives, and then the posters are a collective voice.

But as a genuine reflection of practice itself, it is thought that the greatest level of understanding of the research will be through a complete reading of this document.



## CHAPTER 1

### the research of practice



## BACK CATALOGUE

The review of the productivity of 14 people across nearly 10 years revealed substations, domestic decks, complex laboratory projects, administration and office fitouts, stage sets, kitchen refurbishments, Christmas cards, day surgeries, new houses, masterplanning projects, learning centres and memorials.

The projects were presented case by case, devoid of overarching rationale or thematic approach. The search for meta-narratives, latent qualities, consistent themes, inconsistencies, and outright contradictions began, to better understand the ideological basis of the practice.

"...try to find value in everything.."  
Martyn Hook

"The economic materiality I also  
thought was really interesting..."  
Sand Helsel

"I'm interested in you four as what  
you see as your practice..." Adrian  
Iredale

"...material logic was the only thing  
I picked up each of you talking  
about." Martyn Hook

"Four observations..... (1)  
movement ...I drove past it  
on that freeway and went shit  
look at that..., (2)situation  
serendipity...taking a situation  
and reconstructing it, (3)effects...  
generated by careful work through  
situation and opportunity, ...(4)  
situation poetic...bring those things  
together in a more profound way."  
Richard Blythe

"you were looking at a very  
particular component of that  
situation and beginning to map  
and try to understand..." Richard  
Blythe

"I see your architecture as user  
generated architecture" Tom  
Kovac

"You have a particular technique  
with a specific social messaging,  
and its got a particular participation  
in architecture." Tom Kovac

"...shared adversity....ethos of  
decency seemed to push through  
all the way..." Leon van Schaik

"...people who have spotted the  
subversive humour which is behind  
it..." Leon van Schaik

"...there's a very straight-forward  
realism...where you just say the  
world is pretty messed up, but  
there's something we can do with  
the least possible interference..."  
Leon van Schaik

(opposite) Back catalogue, images  
from selected projects



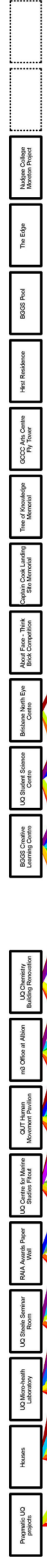
people



themes



projects



outcomes

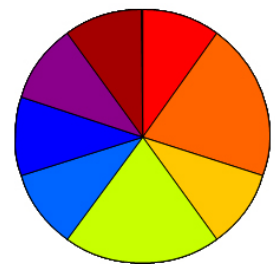
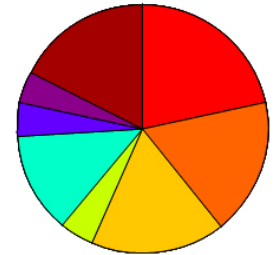
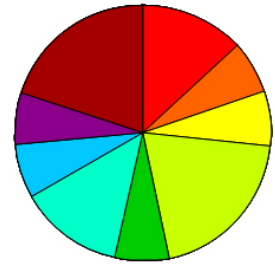




## TAXONOMY

A process of dissection began. Themes were identified and their recurrence was observed in both people and projects. This established a basis for understanding and communicating similarities and differences. It also illuminated the complexity of finding and communicating links between people and outcomes in an objective way. In hindsight, it served mainly as a means to an end, rather than as an outcome in its own right. Nevertheless, through repeated conversations centred around themes, a fluency in communication developed, as it became apparent that subtle shifts in terminology, or adjustments in the level of detail of an exchange, can be the difference between meaningful dialogue and misunderstanding. Projects were organised into groups and discussed thematically, the start of non-project based description.

The taxonomy offered a way of understanding the collective as a blurred complexion of individuals. Importantly, it was apparent that the most notable outcomes occur with the involvement of many. Nevertheless, in parallel with the group taxonomy, individuals began to better understand and speak to their own preferences, peculiarities, and influences on projects and other members of the practice.



Taxonomy, selected projects as they relate to themes, images by m3architecture

"I thought it was an amazing exposition of the impossibility of making a taxonomy of architecture...It was completely absurdist..." Jeremy Till

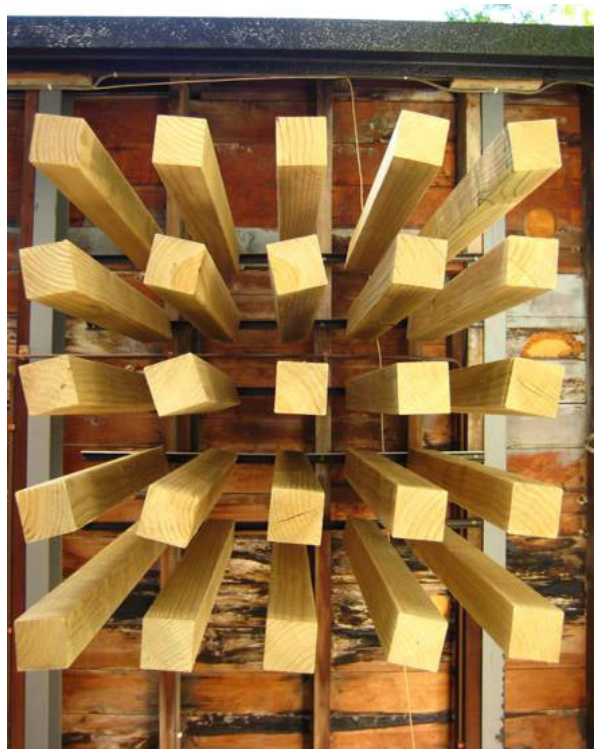
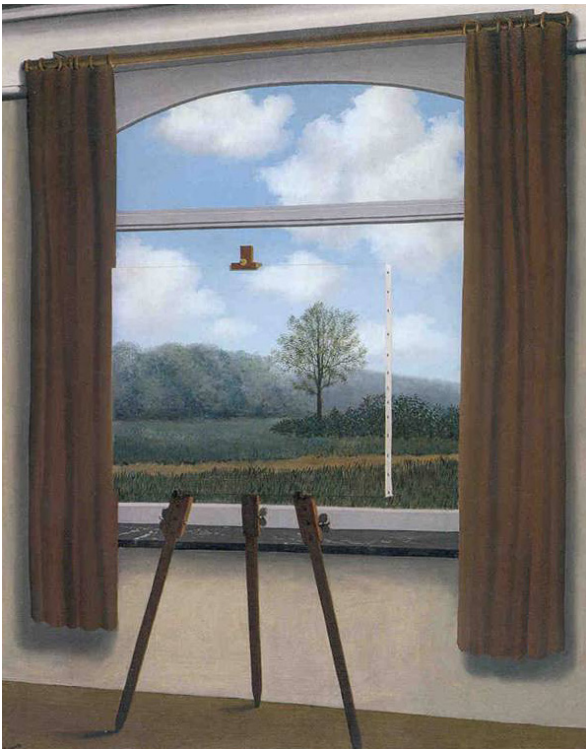
"The objects were described as a consequence of a way of thinking..." Jeremy Till

"...you're very good at looking sideways, at seeing things from the side and seeing opportunities as opposed to dogmatically asserting a process." Jeremy Till

"...go back to the idea of value and take that word very seriously..." Jeremy Till

"... the relationship between the objective and the subjective ...is going to slowly get drawn out in a really nice way" Stephen Collier

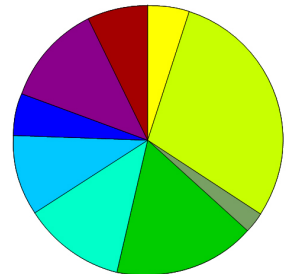
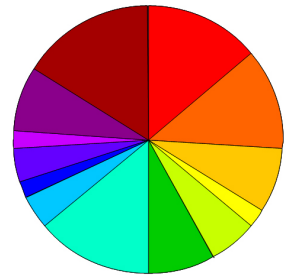
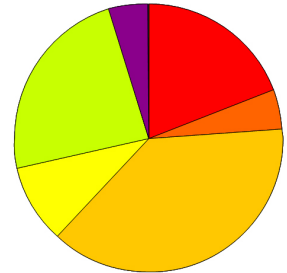
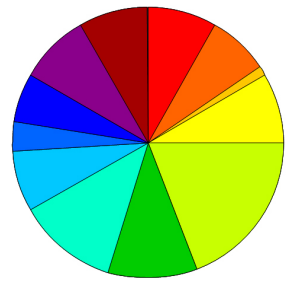
(opposite) Taxonomy, image by m3architecture



### PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Whilst there has been individual representation in the course of the Masters, the focus of this research is that of the collective. Therefore the extent of individual reflection has been limited to the extent necessary to form an appropriate level of understanding of the group dynamic. During this time, each helped the other, revealing simultaneously something of the helper and "helpee". Notably this process formalised differences between people which to that point were only intuitively understood.

This level of self-consciousness focussed the search for the collective voice.



Taxonomy, individuals as they relate to themes, images by m3architecture

"I think the most revealing aspect of each one of you as individuals was how you chose to introduce yourselves. Yours was very text based Michael, yours was filled with images that resonate with you..." Sand Helsel

"...I think you're the Thunderbirds, so each of you plays (with) this particular kind of vehicle that you bring to a situation, and the kind of disaster that is occurring is the project, and you each kind of fly in with your particular skill sets, and then...things happen" Martyn Hook

(opposite) Personal reflection, selected image for each individual, images by m3architecture.  
(bottom left) image by René Magritte "La Condition Humaine" 1933

needs  
overcoming adversity  
humanity  
citizenship  
equality  
everyday lived experience  
inclusive

wants  
excess  
capitalism  
ownership  
commodity  
consumerism  
exclusive

needs  
overcoming adversity  
humanity  
citizenship  
equality  
everyday lived experience  
inclusive

wants  
excess  
capitalism  
ownership  
commodity  
consumerism  
exclusive

project situation

## DEFINING A PROJECT SITUATION

An understanding was emerging around finding ways for 'architecture to participate in a project situation'. The "participatory" nature of the work of the practice had been demonstrated and seemed clear. However, the method for establishing a "project situation" remained latent.

In the search for a communication method that relayed something of the predilection for experience over matter, the socio-political complexion of the group momentarily overtook the architectural agenda. This prompted reference to the necessity for professionals to speak from within their discipline to their horizon, and then to see where it may touch or overlap the boundaries of others. The use of Hegelian dualities was also called into question, as a means of justifying a position.

Nevertheless, the "complexion" was recognised and there was a collective refocussing on the architectural imperatives.

"The mastery it seems is built on the carefully acquired capacity to 'intensify situations' making them more themselves. This drives the multiplicity of the architectural propositions, which do not repeat, and which do not build or consist of a kit of parts...that are reassembled around each new situation" Leon van Schaik

"...intense and direct personal experience in some instances and social experience in another....a series of architectures about places of personal and social pleasures.....dependent or engaged with a material connectedness." Richard Blythe

Further reflection redefined the understanding of practice around situation and process. First, the identification of a situation particular to a project. This is deference to the idiosyncrasies peculiar to circumstance. Second, the deployment of tools common in the work of the practice. Together they describe the idiosyncrasy of the practice. The end game was understood to be an architectural outcome offering intensified experiences, particular to a project.

Once again the complexion was evident but the terminology and communication remained unresolved.

"How do you find what the personal and social moment is?" Richard Blythe

"How do you pick what is to be intensified?" Leon van Schaik

"...the critical thing about the material object conversation was the transformation that you make... working with a sort of intersection of material transformations with a celebration of social and personal pleasures." Richard Blythe

"...would you say you seek active intervention with people and the city?" Leon van Schaik

"...foreground the architectural devices, and then you hang stuff on that." Leon van Schaik

"What I think makes your work unique is that you start from a position of mediating experience... there is a tension between material culture (architectural substance) and phenomenal culture (experience of being in the world)." Iain Low

"...prioritising human experience into the larger project of the world..." Iain Low

"If we go back to the gold tap and the pump, if I was asked to present your work I would present the gold tap actually, but in a fake kind of way. Its through those pleasurable moments that are almost entirely indulgent." Richard Blythe

"...those moments are absolutely critical, and they are rich moments not thin moments." Richard Blythe

"...a kind of underlying ethics in the sense that it opens up more opportunities about how you see the world." Richard Blythe

"...the situation as a piece of architecture within which you can perform." Iain Low

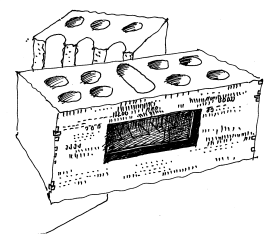
POSTER

### MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

The search for an appropriate means of communication yielded an approach biased toward visual information, with written or spoken supporting material. Posters, which could be understood as projects in their own right, contained provocative images suggestive of modes of practice. The specificity of the message was the very means by which it was communicated.

What evolved was a series of posters that capture the territory between thinking and building. They also provided a structure for accompanying written or spoken word.

"The seminal literary critic IA Richards argued it like this: what we look for in any creative work or its analysis is specificity that surprises. Without this what you summon up in your audience (and indeed in yourself) is a 'stock response'....he cites a poem by DH Lawrence in which we as adults are put in the situation of imagining a building with massive columns from the ceiling of which emanate booming sounds. It seems improbable until we realise that this is the memory of being a four year old child under a piano..." Leon



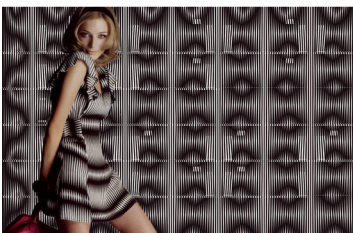
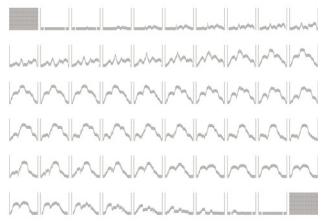
(opposite) Poster, image by  
m3architecture





## CHAPTER 2

### m3architecture



## INTRODUCTION

The images in this chapter define the mental map of the practice of m3architecture, and the territory between thinking and building. In each instance, the accompanying text offers a 'way in' to the image. In moving between images it is intended that connections be made between them, so as to build up an impression of the complexion of the practice.

The images can be read together and apart. Together, they position the practice in macro terms. Apart, they delve into preoccupations and technique, as an overlay upon project outcomes. This enables an understanding of both practice and project simultaneously.

The images are projects in their own right, the process they describe deployed in their making. They are loosely divided into three categories. The first three describe a preoccupation with influences external to the practice, a propensity to find quintessential characteristics of project circumstances. The last ten represent techniques and tendencies observed within the practice. The fourth image is a go-between. It represents a design facility that enables two-way traffic between project idiosyncrasies and practice idiosyncrasies.

(opposite) Images by  
m3architecture

The interpretive nature of this overview of practice fits with the non-linear, non-formulaic nature of work in progress.



## DEFINING A STATE OF AFFAIRS BY SEEKING SPECIFICITY THAT SURPRISES

He is Howard Rourke - quintessential architect. She is Dominique Francon - dressed for cocktails. This is Fountainhead Revisited. It is a mix of occasion and architecture. He holds the finished drawing of the m3architecture paper wall project, and she looks on intently. The paper wall project sits in the background, binding the image together with a sense of earnestness and celebration. The paper wall drawing sits on the drawing board - work in progress.

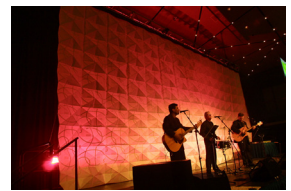
Paper is working medium, communicator and spatial effect. It represents architectural projects and the architectural profession. The drawing sheet was used to build the paper wall stage set literally and referentially. The project fixes upon the opportunity of a project designed by architects, for architects on a night celebrating architecture - the RAIA Queensland State Awards.

1.1 (opposite) Defining a state of affairs by seeking specificity that surprises (image by m3architecture, photo from the movie "The Fountainhead" Ayn Rand and Warner Bros)

The stage is set.



1.1.1 RAIA 2002 state awards  
paper wall stage set (photo by Ian Wilkinson)



1.1.2 RAIA 2002 state awards  
paper wall stage set (photo by Ian Wilkinson)





## DEFINING A STATE OF AFFAIRS BY SEEKING SPECIFICITY THAT SURPRISES

Ghosts fill the room sitting at their old desks, now used as black out “curtains” on the walls.

In this space at University of Queensland built in the 1940’s, there was to be a gutting and refitting; a gutting of the curtains, built in desks, built in bench seats, the tiered floor, and the old blackboard; refitting to make it a flat floor seminar room.

The endearing quality of the built in desks was noticed, followed by the coincidence between the window proportion and that of the desk. Hence the initiative to place the desks on the walls on rollers as black out “curtains” – desks became curtains, floor became desks, seats became ceiling panels. These elements feel vaguely familiar and curiously at home. The desks (curtains) in the open position appear like deep reveals. Light through the windows skims their surfaces highlighting decades of marks;

### “QUESTION EVERYTHING”

#### “WHY?”

Aged surfaces possess traces of former use. Marks made intentionally or otherwise gather incrementally and can contribute to an endearing, un-designed quality; something that only time can yield. They possess mysteries as to the time, event and author. They allow us to imagine these circumstances, and imagine the ghosts of bygone eras.

1.2 (opposite) Defining a state of affairs by seeking specificity that surprises (photo by Jon Linkins, image by m3architecture)



1.2.1 University of Queensland Steele Building seminar room prior to refurbishment (photo by m3architecture)



1.2.2 University of Queensland Steele Building seminar room (photo by Jon Linkins)



1.2.3 University of Queensland Steele Building window detail with recycled desks (photo by Jon Linkins)







## DEFINING A STATE OF AFFAIRS BY SEEKING SPECIFICITY THAT SURPRISES

Members of the Architectural Association masquerading as (living) buildings gather to mourn dead buildings while real buildings at work in the CBD merge as one with the headstones of the city of the dead.

On the fringe of the CBD, until recently there was a Skate Arena. A developer had an application to remove the building and build units. The council in their response to the application made the development unfeasible by requiring the retention of this existing building. Shortly after, the building was burnt to the ground and a man was convicted of arson. Motivated by suspicion and disgust, it became apparent that an anagram of SKATE ARENA is ARSEN ATAKE. This serendipity was the kernel of work that followed.

When requested by the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane to design a temporary stage, an enormous grave for deceased buildings was proposed. On one side of the headstone were the names of buildings, chosen for their cultural significance in Brisbane; Festival Hall, Cloudland, Bellevue Hotel, Skate Arena, The Victory Hotel. On the reverse side of the grave, were the letters scrambled; "FesiBllltY", "land ValuE", "HOTEL LEVvELEd", "ARSoN ATTACK" and "CURE THE HOT HOTEL" as though these buildings had defaced their own grave. In the same way as the heads of the Architectural Association gather at the grave, the grave produced at the Gallery of Modern Art was a place for public gatherings; a stage for the opening and closing of the exhibition and live music performances. Across the course of the exhibition thousands of people went there, performers sang and danced on the grave. Fittingly and symbolically, at the end of the exhibition this new place for cultural gatherings was demolished, sent to the grave itself, to rest in memorial with the buildings it represented.

The work was part of the exhibition entitled "Optimism", and encouraged a review of past behaviour, to inform looking forward and determining what is regarded to be "of value" in our cities and communities, particularly in fostering cultural continuity.



1.3.1 Skate Arena Red Hill (photo by m3architecture)



1.3.2 Gallery of Modern Art stage set concept (image by m3architecture)

1.3 (opposite) Defining a state of affairs by seeking specificity that surprises (photo by Jon Linkins, image by m3architecture)



## ORGANISING DESIGN BY DISTILLING A STATE OF AFFAIRS INTO A LOADED DIAGRAM OR CONCEPT

This is an advertisement, a label, a metaphor, a reality and a diagram of a diagram. This is what happens when you welcome a Titan shed into your architectural world and allow it to take over the formal language and the construction logic of new work. It brings with it an architectural position on the “non-architectural” in accepting the unacceptable.



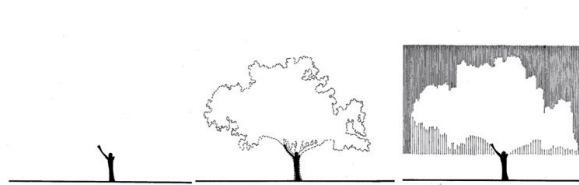
2.1.1 Queensland University of Technology human movement pavilion facade (photo by Jon Linkins)

In the sequence of images this panel mediates between “defining a state of affairs by seeking specificity that surprises” and the subsequent panels. The former, illustrate an interest in unearthing quintessential properties or peculiarities inherent in a project. The latter define practice idiosyncrasies, and the way in which they might be deployed.

Moving between the two modes is a non linear process. There is an awareness of the kind of architectural techniques preferred in certain circumstances, as opportunities through coincidence or specificity are sought (and vice versa) – as familiar techniques are used to orchestrate a way in, coincidences or specificity are sought to provide opportunity.

At some time in most projects, a diagram evolves; a drawing, a piece of text, or a conversation. It is usually formalised to assist in communicating the core idea(s), so as to involve many people in the process. These diagrams tend to be particular enough so that they are useful and provocative, yet baggy enough to allow room to move, and room for many to contribute.

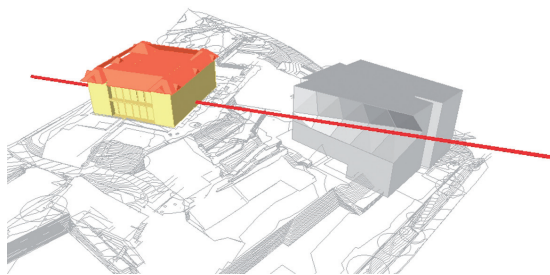
2.1 (opposite) Organising design by distilling a state of affairs into a loaded diagram or concept (photo by Jon Linkins, “Titan Garages & Sheds” logo by Titan Enterprises (QLD) Pty Ltd, image by m3architecture)



2.1.2 Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Memorial concept diagram (images by m3architecture)



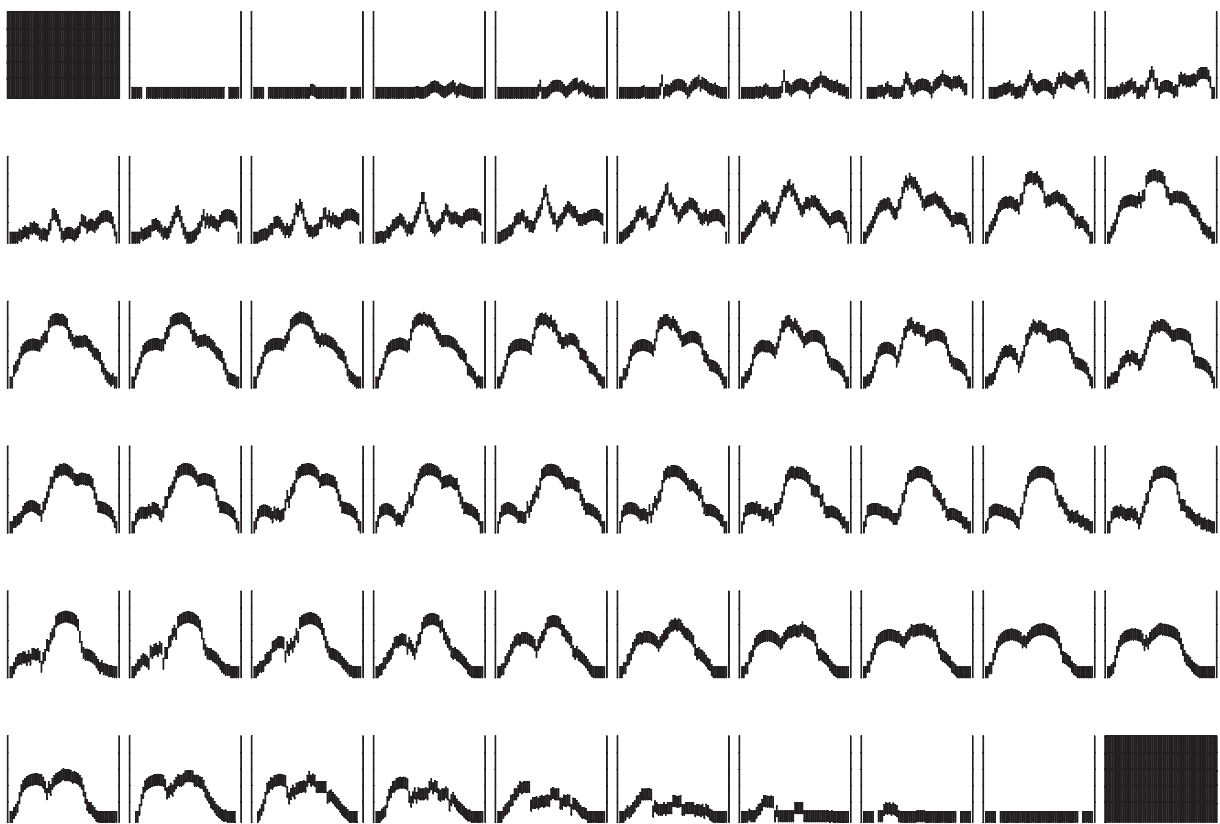
2.1.3 Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Memorial view into canopy (photo by Brian Hooper)



2.1.4 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre east facade concept diagram (image by m3architecture)



2.1.5 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre east facade (photo by Bovis Lend Lease)



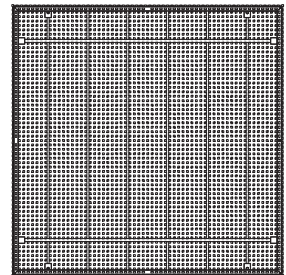


### ENGINEERING LOGIC, REPETITION AND COMPLEXITY

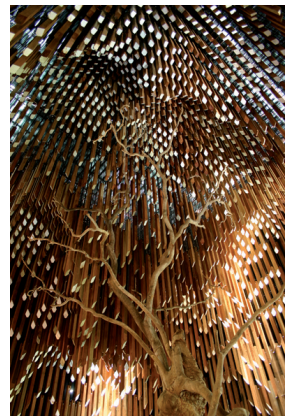
This is a sequence starting with a flat line, working through various states of life and back to a flat line. It is reminiscent of the output of a diagnostic tool. It describes the building accurately both physically and conceptually; physically as these are 60 cross sections of the Tree of Knowledge Memorial, and conceptually, as the exterior, represented by the first and last sections, is understood as a sarcophagus (death), whilst the interior is understood as representational of the original tree canopy (life). Yet the project was never represented in this way. It was often conveyed in plan – a 60x60 grid of 125x125 timbers with a level fixing the height of each stick. This representation makes the project appear deceptively simple.

This is delightful as well as useful; delightful in the duality of simplicity/complexity, and useful in conveying information to industry.

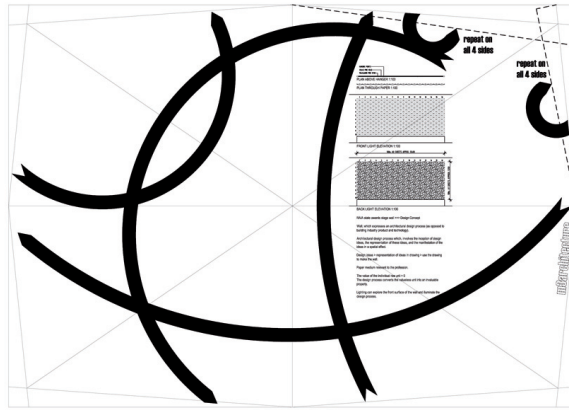
3.1 (opposite) Engineering logic, repetition and complexity (image by m3architecture)



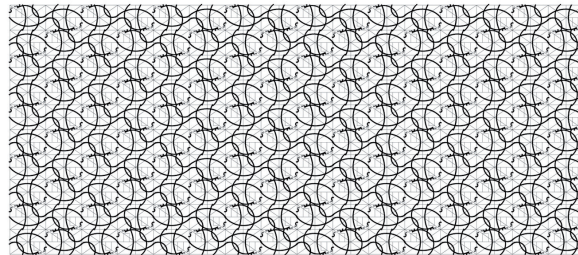
3.1.1 Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Memorial reflected ceiling plan (image by m3architecture)



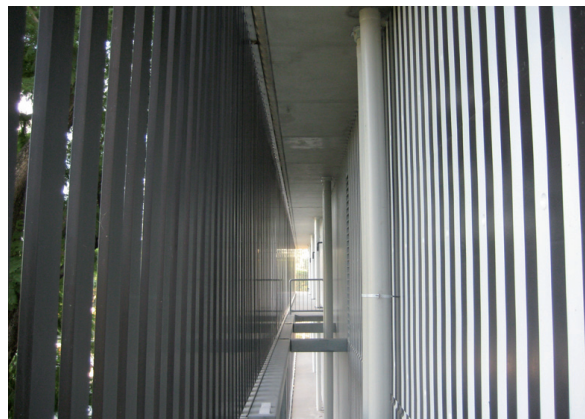
3.1.2 Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Memorial canopy (photo by Brian Hooper)



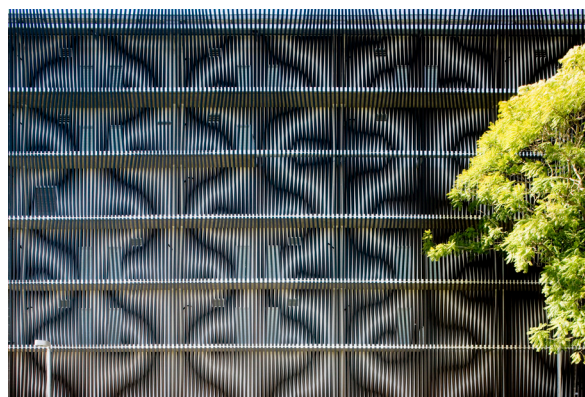
3.1.3 Paper wall A1 sheet unit (image by m3architecture)



3.1.4 Paper wall assembled 16 sheets wide by 10 sheets high (image by m3architecture)

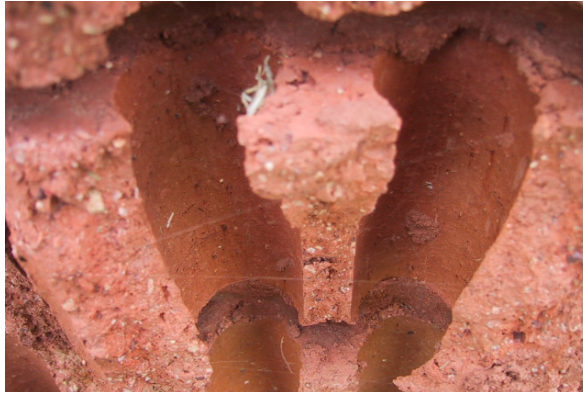


3.1.5 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre west facade view between aluminium screen and striped wall (photo by m3architecture)

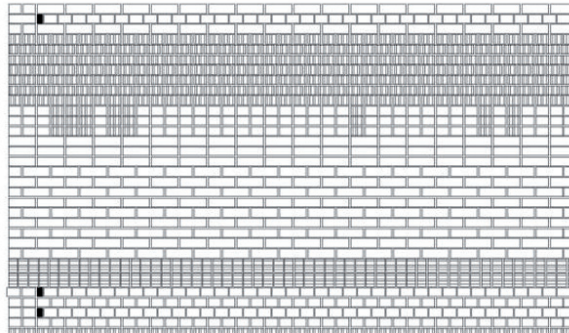


3.1.6 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre west facade interference pattern (photo by Jon Linkins)

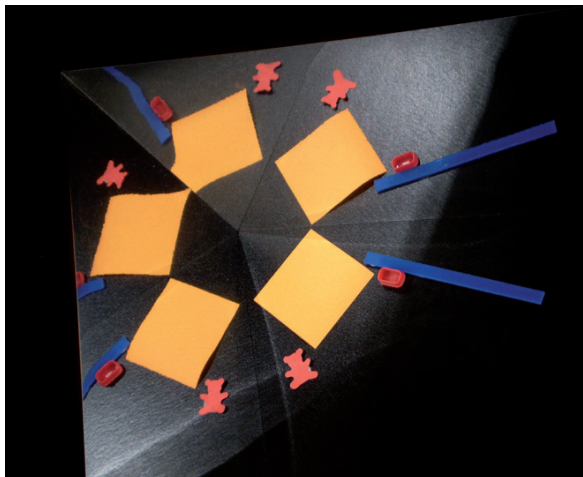




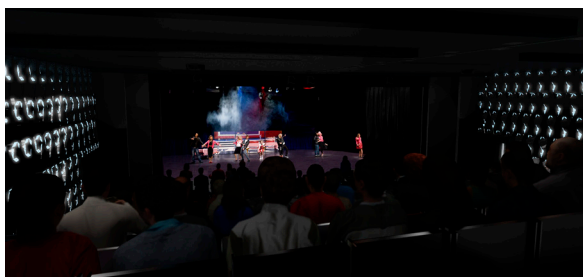
3.1.7 University of Queensland Micro Health Laboratory bolster cut bricks (photo by m3architecture)



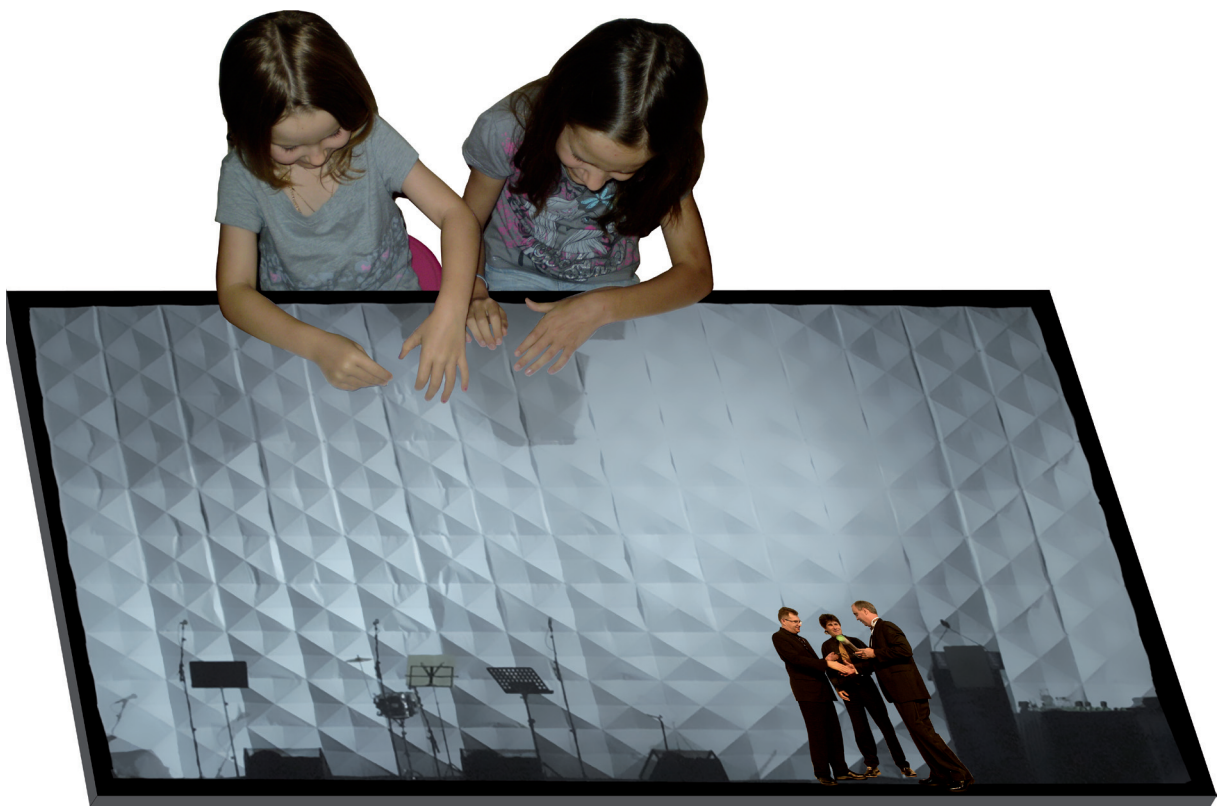
3.1.8 University of Queensland Micro Health Laboratory bolster cut bricks assembled as brick veneer (image by m3architecture)



3.1.9 Nudgee College Tierney Hall mirror laminate used to create a kaleidoscope unit (photo by m3architecture)



3.1.10 Nudgee College Tierney Hall kaleidoscope unit repeated to form walls in an auditorium (image by Candela Studio)

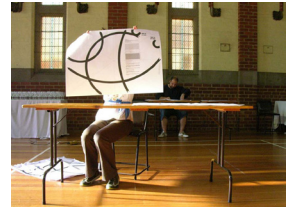


#### EXTENDING CONVENTIONAL WAYS OF MAKING

In a scene reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland, three grown men gather in front of giant origami crafted by two small girls. For m3architecture, this incongruity is encouraged. In this instance it occurs for two main reasons; first taking “child’s play” and elevating it to centre stage, and second, taking a traditional fine scale craft and using its principles, but extending its application.

In the practice of m3architecture there is interest in convention, and making it visibly expressed and acknowledged, as well as extended or broken as required.

In the paper wall project, each A1 sheet is a folded unit. The particular fold utilised is common in origami, and was used as it produced collapsible modules. The drawings on the sheet illustrated the fold for individual units as well as the assembly of the whole wall, 16 sheets wide by 10 sheets high. Origami of this scale is unexpected and there is unorthodoxy in a wall made of frameless paper. When front-lit, the clean, prismatic three-dimensional, “finished” qualities of the surface were emphasized. When back-lit, the wall took on a lantern quality and revealed the drawings through the translucence of the paper. This revealed a pattern, a counterpoint to the front experience – a paisley-like interconnected pattern – the “workings” of the wall. In traditional origami, the path to the folded outcome is often undecipherable in the work itself. In this case it was formalised, laid bare and enjoyed as an integral part of the process and outcome of the wall.

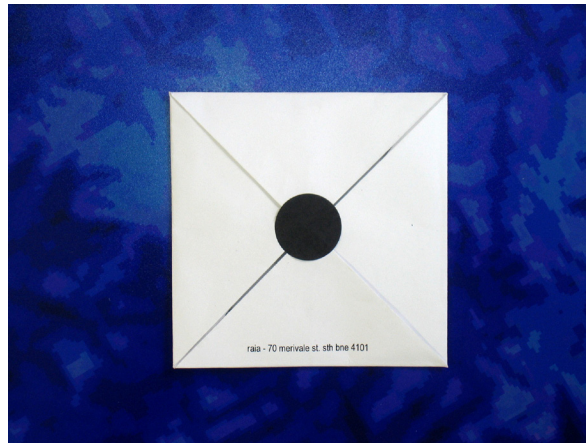


4.1.1 Paper wall assembly (photo by Mark Raggatt)

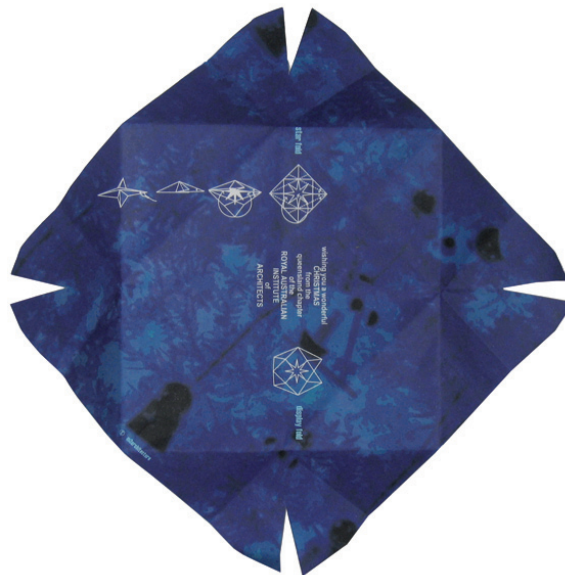


4.1.2 Paper wall installation (photo by Mark Raggatt)

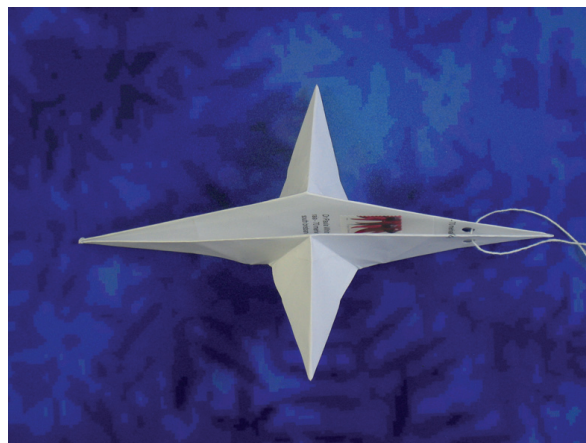
4.1 (opposite) Extending conventional ways of making (photo by Ian Wilkinson, image by m3architecture)



4.1.3 (R)AIA Christmas Card as envelope (photo by m3architecture)

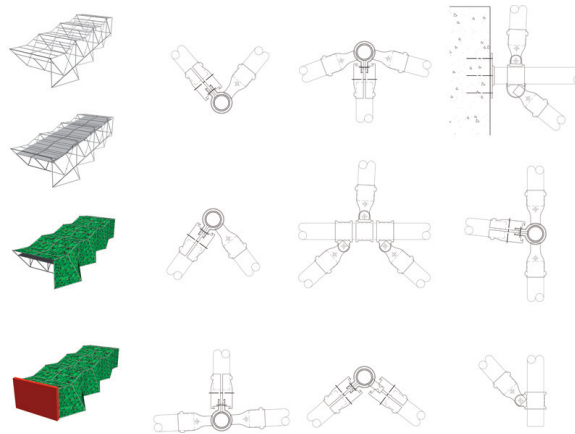


4.1.4 (R)AIA Christmas Card as message and instruction (photo by m3architecture)



4.1.5 (R)AIA Christmas Card as origami ornament (photo by m3architecture)





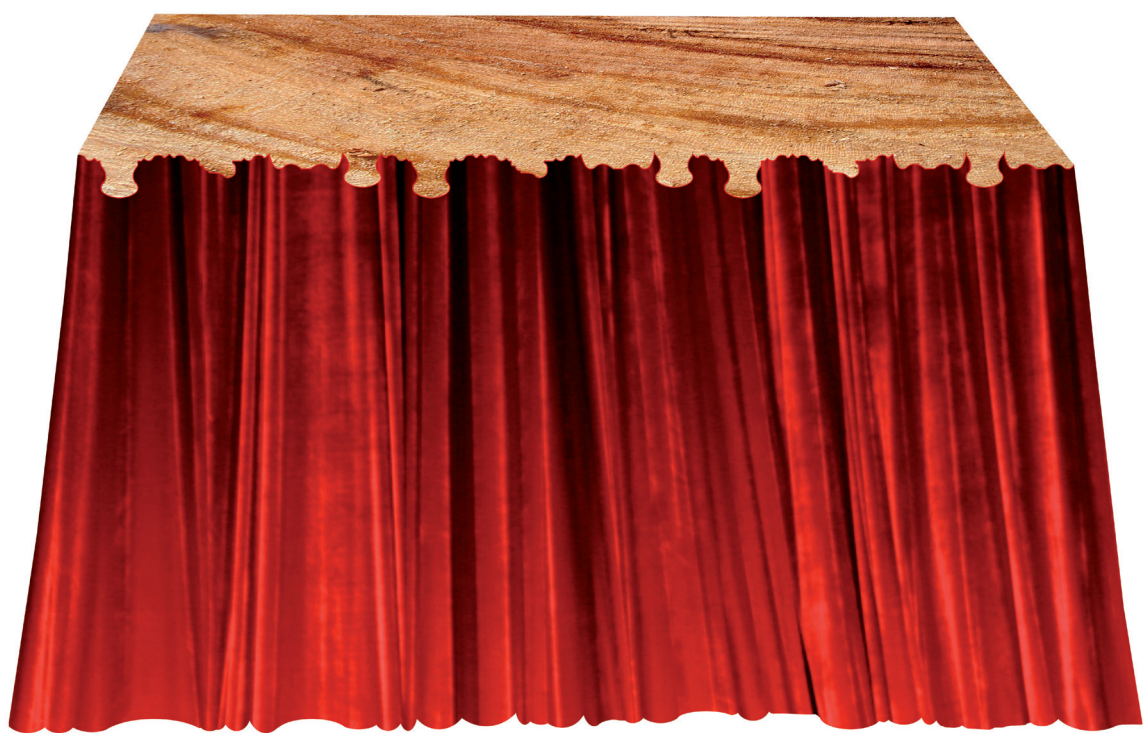
4.1.6 Australian National University Burton and Garran Hall bicycle shelters, steel pipe and fence couplers used to build a frugal shelter (images by m3architecture)



4.1.7 Armstrong Residence broomsticks and plumbing pipe couplers used to form stair balustrade (photo by m3architecture)



4.1.8 m3architecture office stair stringer used upside down (photo by Shannon McGrath)



## DETAILING TO SUBVERT THE PHYSICALITY OF BUILDING MATERIALS

What happens when solid timber masquerades as a velvet curtain? What happens when the reality of the timber is still vaguely familiar, but with an overwhelming sense of curtain-ness? The perception is neither of timber or velvet, but of something else. This relies on a near transformation of the timber. When completely transformed it becomes the other thing and the intrigue is lost. With too little transformation, there is a chance that the prosaic will be too apparent. There is enjoyment in enabling others to access the subversion through the revelation of “truth”.

Used in the joinery pieces for the Brisbane North Eye Centre, standard timber sections are used alongside one another, capped at the ends to hide their cross sectional realities. In revealing only the front face, the thickness of the building element is unable to be known. Visually, it could be the thickness of a curtain. This is contradicted through the solidity felt through touch. From the waiting area, patients “see” the joinery fascia. There is interest in how these elements are perceived or “seen”, particularly in the context of the eye clinic. The difference between what is “seen” and what is understood, is a means of generating engaging qualities in architecture.

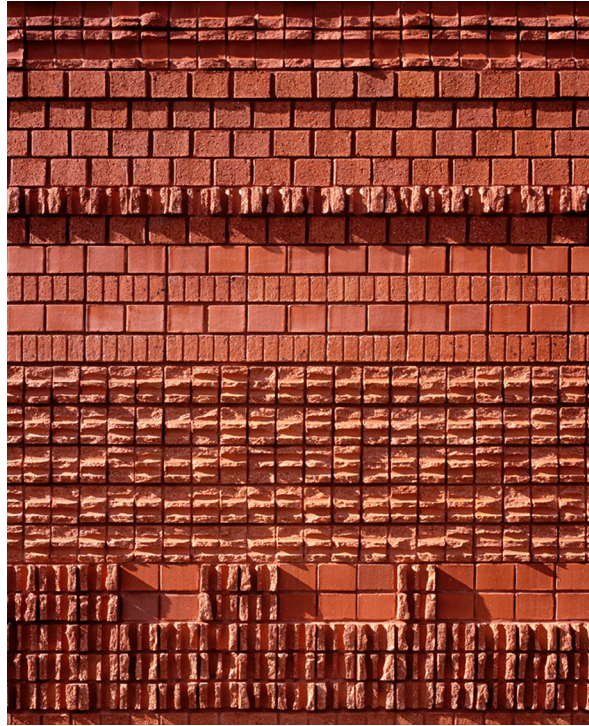
5.1 (opposite) Detailing to subvert the physicality of building materials (image by m3architecture)



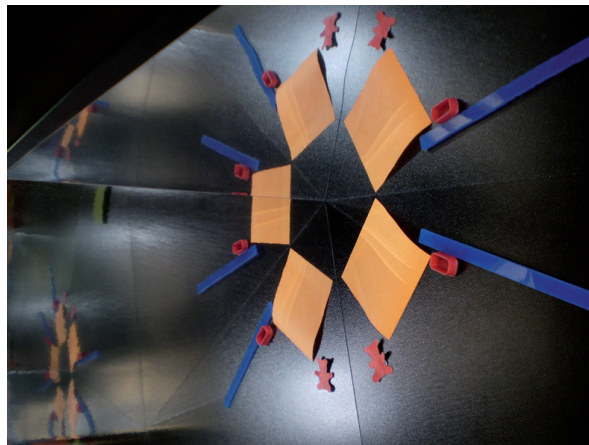
5.1.1 Brisbane North Eye Centre reception counter (photo by Aperture Architectural Photography)



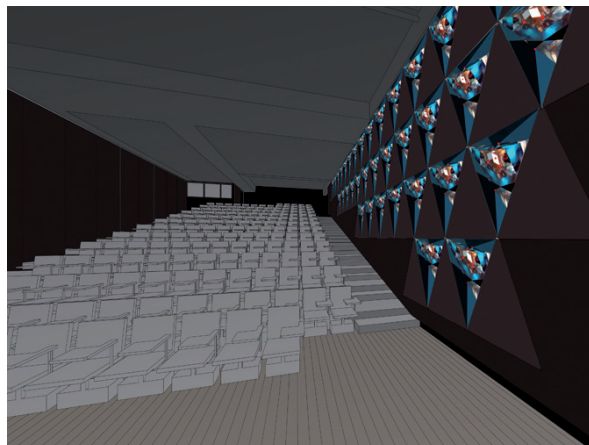
5.1.2 Brisbane North Eye Centre facade (photo by Aperture Architectural Photography)



5.1.3 University of Queensland Micro Health Laboratory brick work (photo by m3architecture)



5.1.4 Nudgee College Tierney Hall kaleidoscope effect used on auditorium wall (photo by m3architecture)



5.1.5 Nudgee College Tierney Hall kaleidoscope effect used on auditorium wall (image by m3architecture)





5.1.6 Armstrong Residence mirror wall dissolves the building edge into landscape (photo by Jon Linkins)



5.1.7 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre west facade (photo by Jon Linkins)



5.1.8 Paper wall stage set, origami wall (photo by Ian Wilkinson)



### HYPING BUILT CONVENTIONS

Often, existing built environments are conventional and unremarkable or even undesirable. Sometimes the most effective intervention is to reinforce or hype existing qualities, rather than to conquer. It is possible to elicit a new sense of appreciation of the formerly undesirable quintessential properties of space or surface, by teasing them out to illogical conclusions.

The image depicts a laboratory interior requiring an uninterrupted corridor. The 1960's institutional building grid was also ever-present. Hying the combination of these two elements by exploiting the effects of perspective, results in a highly memorable spatial quality.

Two of the characters from the 1960s television show 'The Time Tunnel' are seen at the end of the two-point perspective, further exaggerating the effect already present in the space, by defying the vanishing point. In the actual fitout, the perception of this vanishing point is enhanced by a series of concentric linear rectangles painted on the fire exit door. When the viewer stands off centre in the corridor, the difference between the true perspective of the corridor and the fake perspective of the fire door is apparent, resulting in the feeling that space bends at the junction between both.

6.1 (opposite) Hying built conventions (photo by Jon Linkins, image from "The Time Tunnel" by 20th Century Fox, image by m3architecture)



6.1.1 University of Queensland Chemistry building level 6 (photo by Shannon McGrath)



6.1.2 University of Queensland Chemistry building level 6 (photo by Jon Linkins)





6.1.3 Queensland University of Technology Human Movement Pavilion, extension to a "Titan" shed (photo by Jon Linkins)



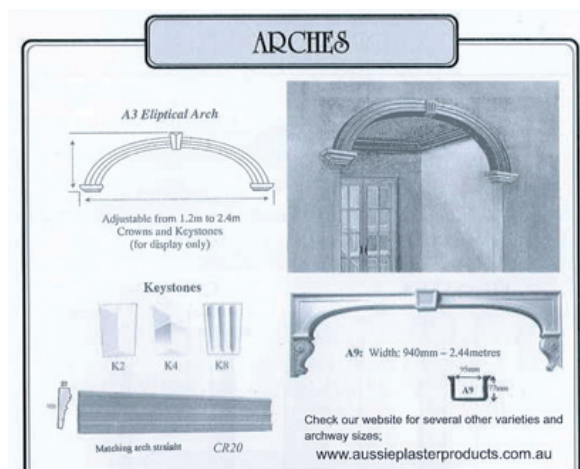
6.1.4 University of Queensland Science Learning Centre, personal lighting (photo by Jon Linkins)



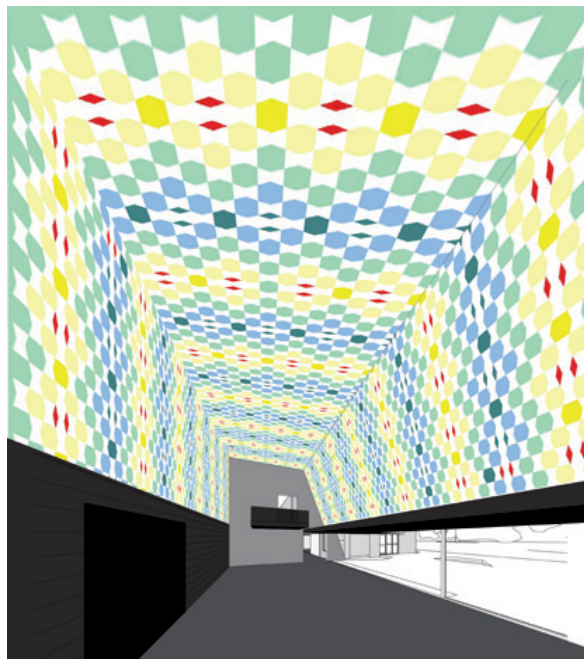
6.1.5 Gold Coast Arts Centre fly tower clad with convex traffic mirrors (photo by m3architecture)



6.1.6 Volbroker tenancy, electrical cable trays used to construct screen  
(photo by m3architecture)



6.1.7 Nudgee College Tierney Hall plaster keystone used to clad ceiling  
(extract from Aussie Plaster Products catalogue)



6.1.8 Nudgee College Tierney Hall plaster keystone used to clad ceiling  
(image by m3architecture)





## DISPLACING OBJECTS

What happens when you put a velvet curtain beside an eight lane bitumen arterial road? The disjunction is remarkable and provocative. The luxurious qualities of the curtain are heightened in this diesel laden environment. This immediately encourages questions to be asked of the unorthodoxy of the curtain placement “What is it doing here?” When there is cause to be provocative, displacement can be a useful device.

In this instance, the curtain is the façade of Brisbane North Eye Centre, which displaced a cinema. Conceptually, the project draws together the former use and the current use, the former a theatre for movies and the latter a theatre for day surgery. The displacement of the curtain from stage to street is a gentle reminder of things past.

In the practice of m3architecture, this technique is recognisable in materials and finishes, as well as building elements at a variety of scales. The displaced object illuminates the idiosyncratic elements which define the state of affairs for the project.



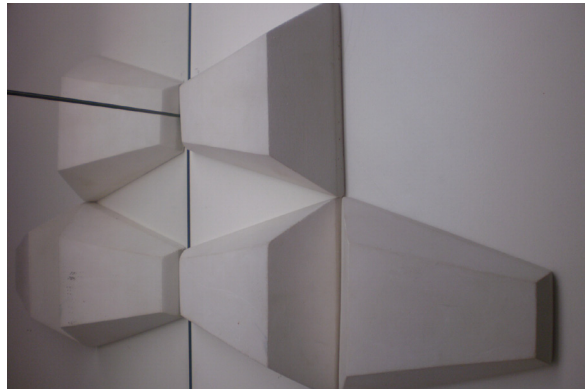
7.1.1 Brisbane North Eye Centre facade (photo by Aperture Architectural Photography)

7.1 (opposite) Displacing objects  
(photo by Aperture Architectural  
Photography, image by  
m3architecture)

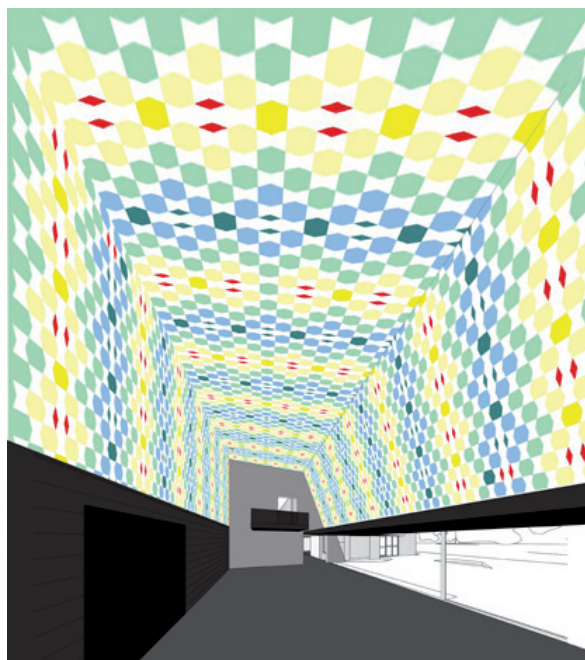




7.1.2 University of Queensland Steele building seminar room, desks displaced onto wall as window shutters (photo by Jon Linkins)



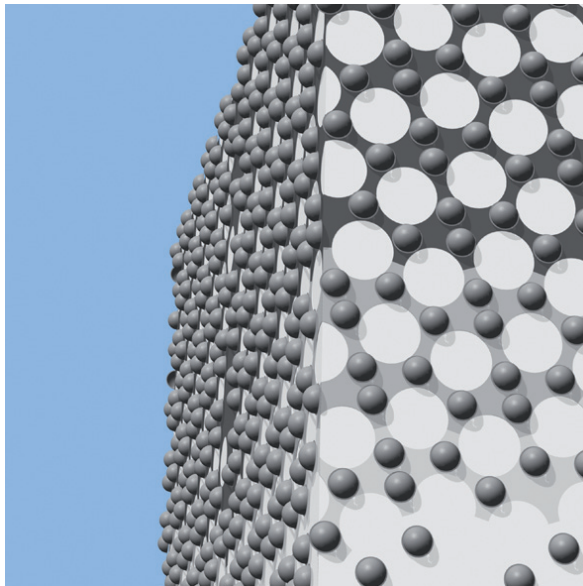
7.1.3 Nudgee College Tierney Hall plaster keystone used to clad ceiling (photo by m3architecture)



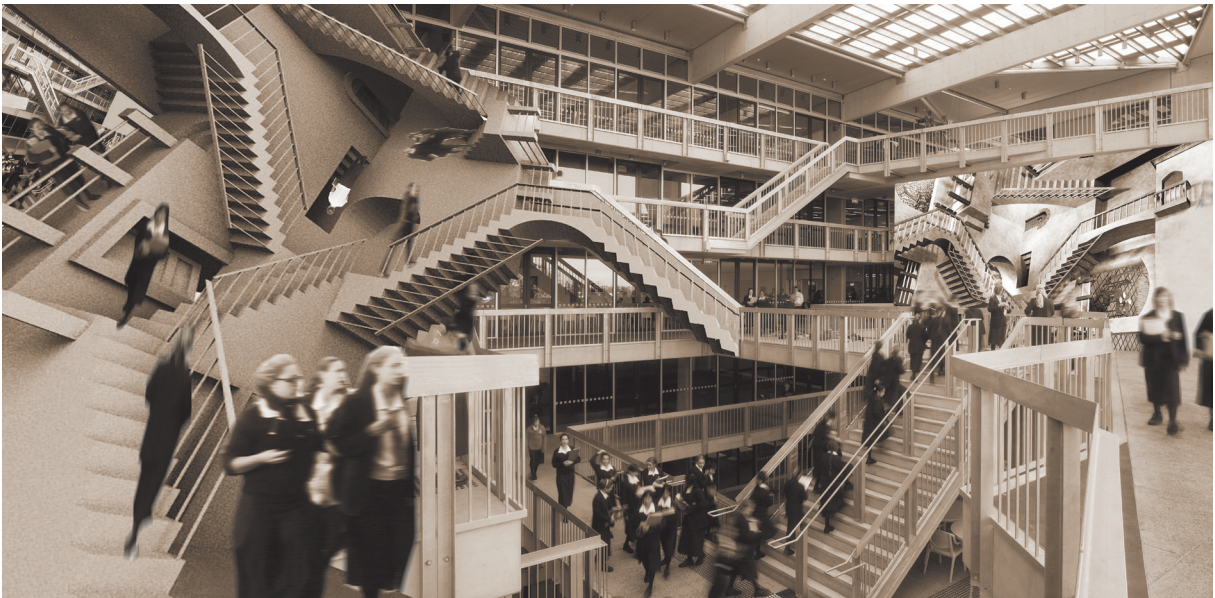
7.1.4 Nudgee College Tierney Hall plaster keystone used to clad ceiling (image by m3architecture)



7.1.5 Gold Coast Arts Centre fly tower clad with convex traffic mirrors  
(photo by m3architecture)



7.1.5 Gold Coast Arts Centre fly tower clad with convex traffic mirrors  
(image by m3architecture)





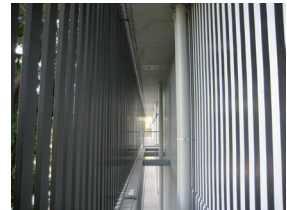
## FINDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COEXISTENCE OF PRAGMATIC AND POETIC CONDITIONS

The work of MC Escher commonly works with perpetual motion or eternal connectivity as well as impossible perspective. Viewers are drawn into these images through their apparent tangibility only to find dead ends, upside down/inside out 3D impossibilities, and then retracing ones mental steps to see where things stopped making sense. The magic and wonderment of Escher's spatial constructs is uncommon in our rational world.

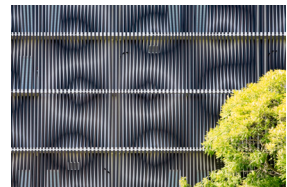
However, what can be found in projects are occasions when the most prosaic or pragmatic response to very objective requirements result in such peculiarity or unorthodoxy as to be surprising. This illustration is Brisbane Girls Grammar School Creative Learning Centre social space. The school is located on a very complex sloping site. The building traverses 8 storeys of terrain. It was desirable that each floor level have a relationship with the corresponding ground level. This in itself resulted in 3D complexity. In addition to this, the most convenient paths of travel and socialisation opportunities for students were able to be reasonably predicted. These considerations added a further layer of complexity to the scheme. The result is idiosyncratic and a rather 'Escher-like' or 'Hogwarts-like' spatial condition.

In the process of design, particularly in design and construct procurement, there is often a need to be seen to be "rational", "objective", "pragmatic"... It is a common practice to position architectural strategies through pragmatic frames of reference, aware that the primary perception will be otherwise; in this case, from pragmatic beginnings, to a space which is peculiar and complex, with eternal connectivity facilitating the churn of circulation and socialisation on a daily basis.

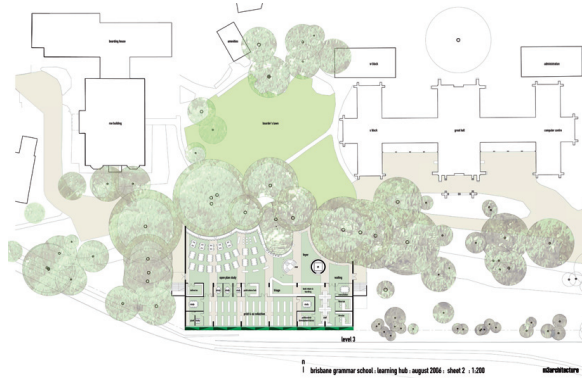
8.1 (opposite) Finding opportunities for the coexistence of pragmatic and poetic conditions (photo by Jon Linkins, artwork "Relativity" by MC Escher, image by m3architecture)



8.1.1 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre west wall facade (photo by m3architecture)



8.1.2 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre west wall facade (photo by Jon Linkins)



8.1.3 Brisbane Grammar School Learning Hub, historic fig tree canopies used to describe a facade line (image by m3architecture)



8.1.4 m3architecture office stair stringer used in reverse (photo by Shannon McGrath)



8.1.5 m3architecture office forecourt concrete plates which map the existing terrain (photo by Shannon McGrath)



8.1.6 University of Queensland Steele Building seminar room existing desks (photo by m3architecture)



8.1.7 University of Queensland Steele Building seminar room existing desks transformed into window shutters (photo by Jon Linkins)



8.1.8 University of Queensland Centre for Marine Studies, modified existing fabric and new fabric is identified (photo by Jon Linkins)





### LIFTING THE ORDINARY OUT OF THE PROSAIC

Bricks are to project homes what project homes are to urban sprawl. This contributes to the perception that in the building industry, perhaps there is nothing more ordinary or prosaic than the common brick.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to look to a common brick for cues, to open the brick up to new possibilities both literally and metaphorically. It is also possible to see the potentials alive within the brick, and begin to work with bricks in a very different manner. The complexity of the extruded interior of the brick is a lost quality. Through bolster cutting bricks, and laying the bricks cut side facing out exposing the extruded surfaces and the hand made cut, there was a shift in the perception the capability of bricks. The resultant building sits in the context of 1970's brick buildings which are in themselves entirely prosaic, now lifted by the new work.

9.1 (opposite) Lifting the ordinary out of the prosaic (photo by Jon Linkins, image by m3architecture)

The image represents the brick and the building as inseparable elements. It depicts the building as a veneer to the brick. It illustrates what is possible in commonly prosaic brick veneer construction, by looking beyond the veneer of the brick itself.



9.1.1 University of Queensland Micro Health laboratory under construction (photo by m3architecture)



9.1.2 University of Queensland Micro Health laboratory under construction (photo by m3architecture)



9.1.3 University of Queensland Micro Health laboratory under construction (photo by m3architecture)



9.1.4 University of Queensland Science Learning Centre, rejected steel plumbing used to support lighting (photo by m3architecture)



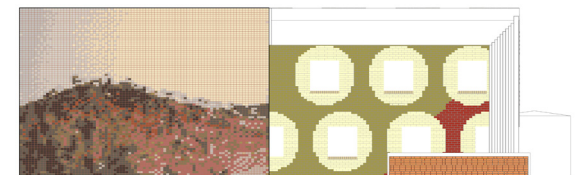
9.1.5 University of Queensland Science Learning Centre, rejected steel plumbing used to support lighting (photo by Jon Linkins)



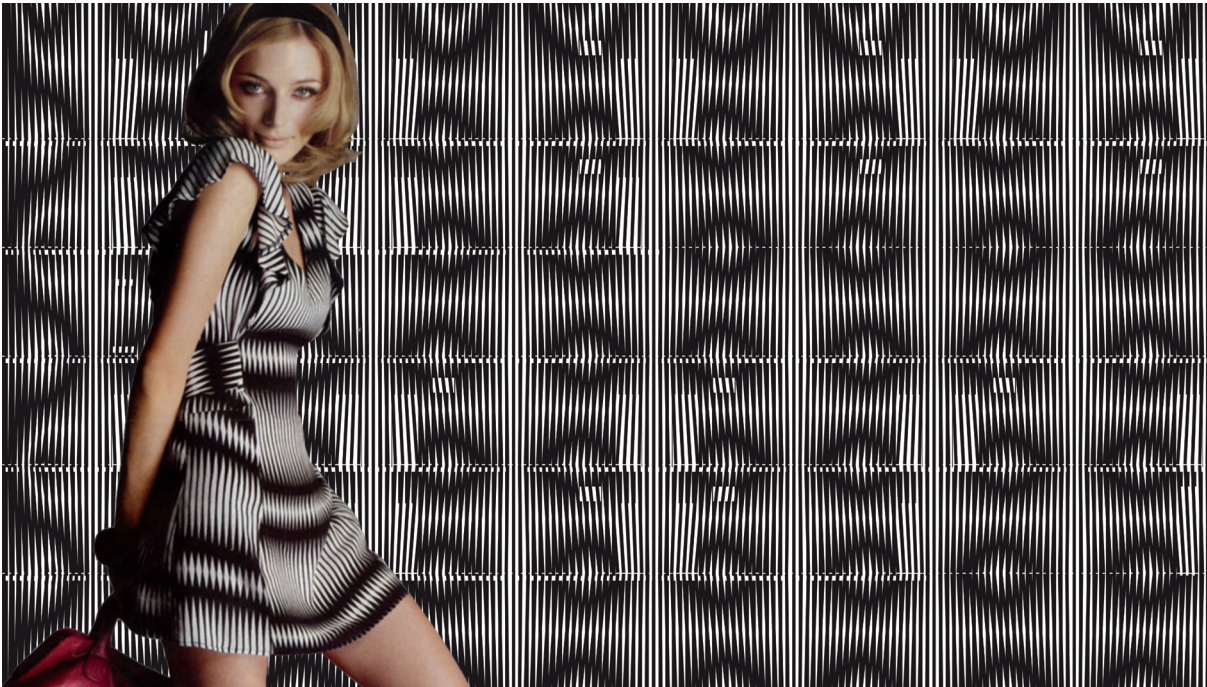
9.1.6 Queensland University of Technology Human Movement Pavilion extension to existing "Titan" shed (photo by Jon Linkins)



9.1.7 Queensland University of Technology Human Movement Pavilion teaching space references the form of the existing "Titan" shed (photo by Jon Linkins)



9.1.8 Think Brick About Face Competition indicating use of locally sourced brickwork to re-create a Fred Williams painting of the Australian landscape (image by m3architecture)





## ENCOURAGING MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS

Is this a dress overtaking a building or a building clothing a model? What is the relationship between the dress and the façade? Is it to do with this being the façade of a private girl's school? Or on the contrary, is it politicising modelling in the context of what has been regarded by some as a feminist private girl's school? Is it offensive? Is it humorous? Is the façade pattern and that of the dress fabric coincidental, and their coming together in this image purely for the sake of making this point?

And what about the façade itself? "...what is that about, and can someone please tell me what it's made of, and by the way, where are the motors hidden?" "Is it some kind of visual reference to op art?" "Is it some kind of cheeky reference to parts of the female anatomy?" "Is it inspired by 1960's fabric patterns?"

The façade is that of Brisbane Girls Grammar School Creative Learning Centre. It's pattern is caused by the overlay of a sunscreen over a striped façade, resulting in visual "interference" and a motile effect when the viewer is in motion. Whilst the final pattern was deliberate(d), and takes subtle cues from a neighbouring building of significance, it stops short of explicit physical reference. Other than acting as a sun screen, its primary purpose is to engage commuters and people on the adjacent playing field – people in motion.

It is geared to its audience, children and adults alike. If the expected reading of architecture is too cryptic or narrow it tends toward exclusivity. If it is too direct it may be accessible to many, but its engaging quality can die quickly. A balance between these poles is sought along with an understanding of the audience, with the hope of achieving engaging and enduring results, with different meanings for different people.

10.1 (opposite) Encouraging multiple interpretations (image by m3architecture)



10.1.1 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre west facade (photo by Jon Linkins)



10.1.2 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre north facade (photo by Jon Linkins)



10.1.3 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre east facade (photo by Jon Linkins)



10.1.4 Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Creative Learning Centre level 4 entry (photo by Jon Linkins)

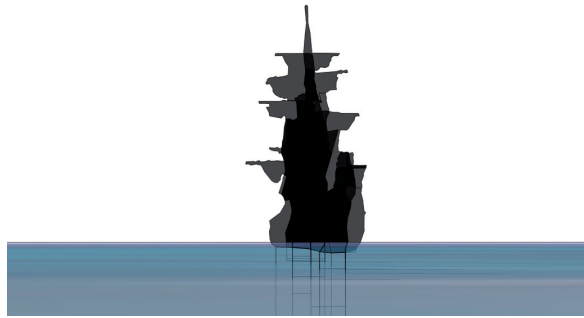


10.1.5 Arsén Atake Gallery of Modern Art stage set, grave stone to dead buildings (photo by Jon Linkins)



10.1.6 Arsén Atake Gallery of Modern Art stage set, grave stone to dead buildings defaced to indicate the cause of their demise (photo by Natasha Harth)





10.1.7 Cook's Landing Site National Monument Competition, sculptural objects placed off shore which align to form the figure of the moored Endeavour (image by m3architecture)



10.1.8 Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Memorial external view (photo by Brian Hooper)



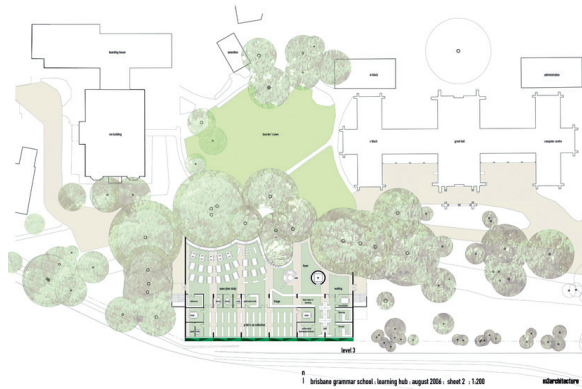
10.1.9 Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Memorial internal view (photo by Brian Hooper)



#### MAKING THE CHOSEN STATE OF AFFAIRS EXPLICIT

The saying 'the elephant in the room' refers to an issue large and present, but unspoken. In this illustration this is an elephant in the room, or, with the understanding that the pavilion has a mirrored wall, an elephant standing just behind the viewers right shoulder, a disturbing and confronting thought in such a small domestic garden setting. There is a preference for finding the elephant and working with it, making it visible and formalised. Often this resides in the "state of affairs" we choose to work with. But it also affects how visible or legible we make the "state of affairs". In this case it was a client's pre-occupation with a rear garden resulting in a pavilion designed to extend the perception of landscape from common paths of travel. The inclusion of the elephant in the image, references the saying, and contributes to the wilderness quality of the garden. In making a chosen state of affairs explicit there is a will to connect people with the architectural imperative.

11.1 (opposite) Making the chosen state of affairs explicit (photo by Shannon McGrath, image by m3architecture)



11.1.1 Brisbane Grammar School Learning Hub, historic fig tree canopies used to describe a facade line (image by m3architecture)



11.1.2 University of Queensland Steele Building seminar room existing desks transformed into window shutters (photo by Jon Linkins)



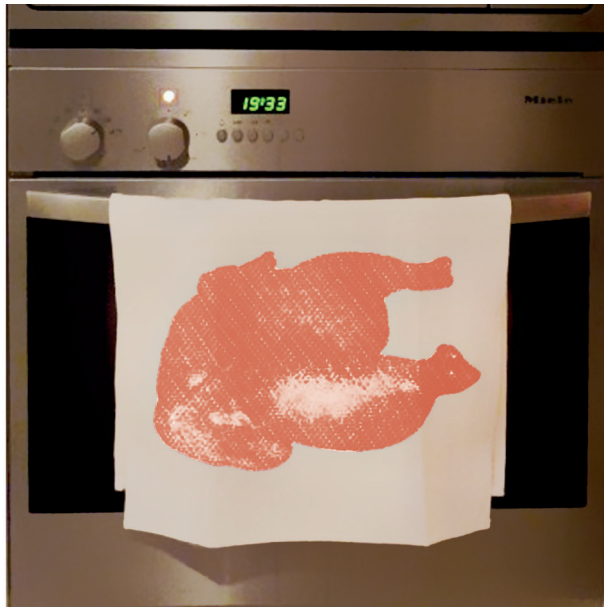


11.1.3 Arsene Atake Gallery of Modern Art stage set, grave stone to dead buildings defaced to indicate the cause of their demise (photo by Natasha Harth)



11.1.4 University of Queensland Centre for Marine Studies, modified existing fabric and new fabric is identified (photo by Jon Linkins)

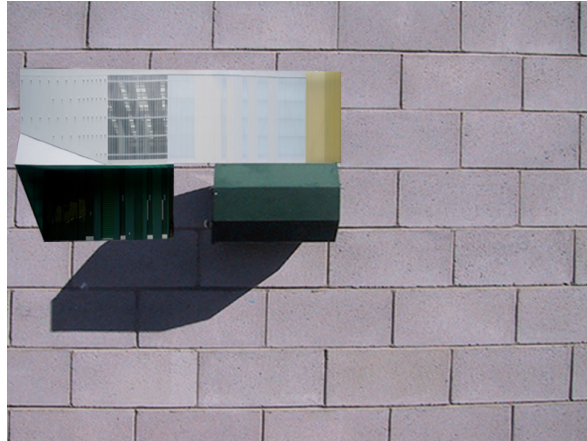




#### FINDING HUMOUR

There is a problem with either the humour or the recipient when a joke needs to be explained.

12.1 (opposite) Finding humour  
(image by m3architecture)



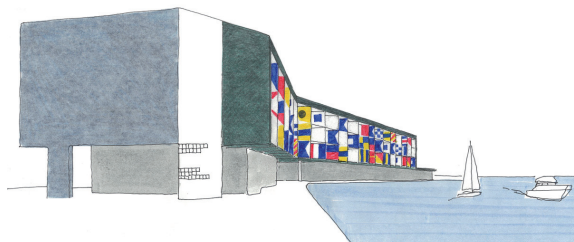
12.1.1 Queensland University of Technology Human Movement Pavilion, speculative scheme to build an addition to proprietary green letter box (photo and image by m3architecture)



12.1.2 University of Queensland Chemistry building level 6 corridor experience (photo by Shannon McGrath)



12.1.3 Arsen Atake Gallery of Modern Art stage set (photo by Joanne Bell)



12.1.4 Magnetic Island development, "this is a handy cove and a well situated grog shop" translation of nautical flags (image by m3architecture)



12.1.5 Think Brick About Face Competition, image of a wall made of brick depicting an image of brick walls (image by m3architecture)





## CHAPTER 3

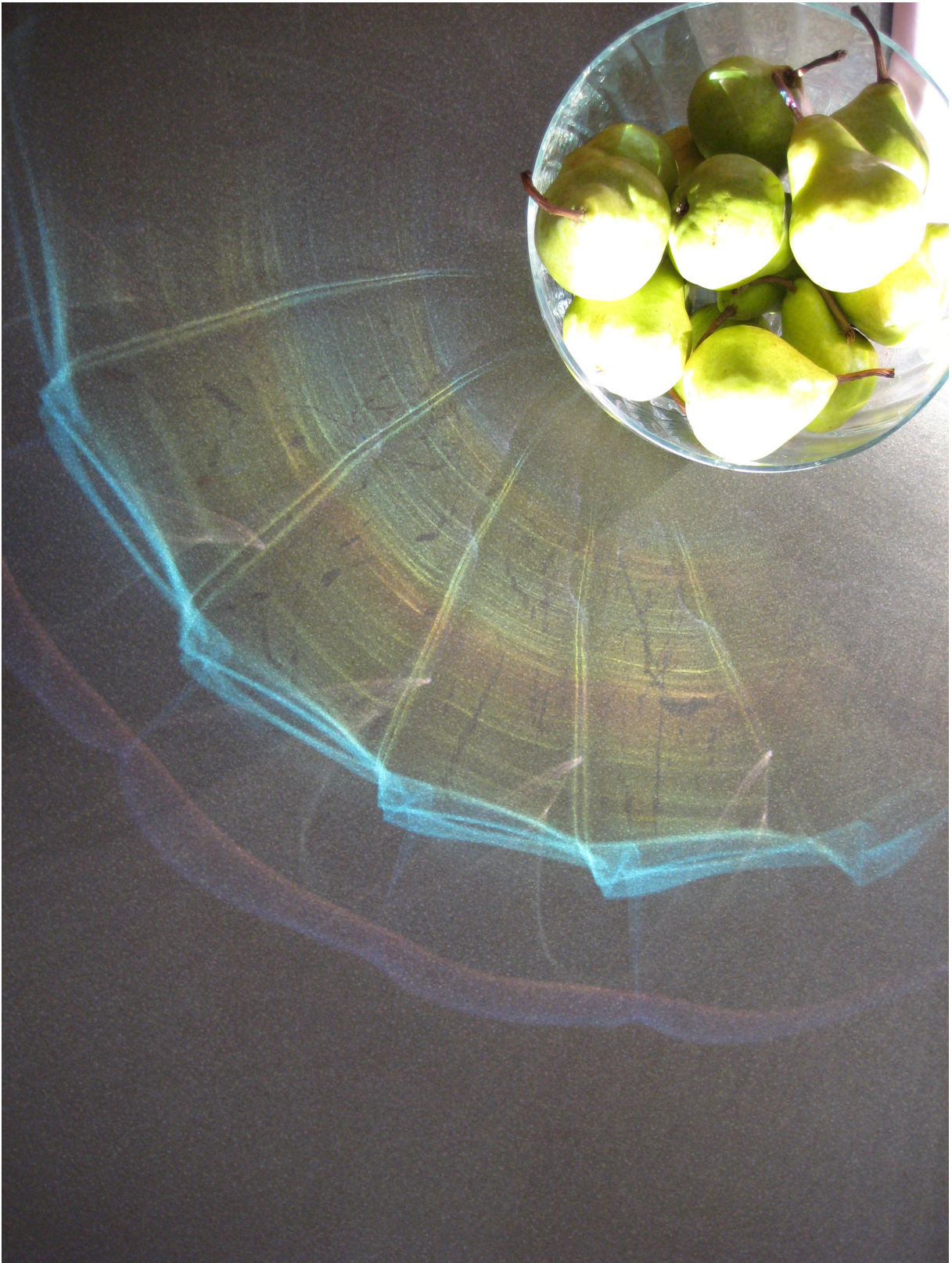
### idiosyncrasies



## INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 is a representation of ideas and techniques commonly held in the collective practice of m3architecture. The relationship between individuals and the collective is complex. Techniques and themes are used by different people in different ways, and to different extents.

Chapter 3 provides an insight into the predominant imperative of the individuals. These personal accounts add colour to the complexion of practice already described in Chapter 1.



MICHAEL BANNEY

occasion (n)

1. a particular time, especially as marked by certain happenings
2. a special or important time, event, ceremony etc
3. the ground, reason, or cause of some action or result

It is possible to talk about "occasion" in three ways. First, an occasion facilitated by physical things (similar to definition 1). Second, the result of small actions (but sometimes profound nevertheless) or large events experienced throughout our lives (similar to definition 2). At the confluence of both, an impetus or occasion for architecture can be found (similar to definition 3).

Crudely,  $1 + 2 = 3$  (occasionally!)

(low level afternoon sun penetrating deep into the kitchen)  
+(making dessert for dinner) = (the bowl placed knowingly on the bench because it refracts light beautifully at certain times)

The crucial part of the equation is the living act; (making dessert for dinner). The action in 3 enriches the experience of 2, through the power of 1. Nevertheless, in an hour the sun will be gone and the bowl will be in the cupboard. In three hours dessert will be gone too. Yet the memories will remain, but not of the bowl or the bench, ordinary things in isolation. The memories that endure cling to the collective experiences of the living act. The particulars of the contingent forces at play; sun, bowl, pears and laminate fade. Yet a sense of the occasion lives strongly in memory.

This approach in architecture sets up a particular relationship between the living act and the physical object. It also establishes a propensity to deal with materials in certain ways. Paradoxically, a foremost preoccupation with the "non-physical" requires an equal preoccupation with the "physical".

When architecture is approached in this way, "occurrence" is frequently redefined as "occasion".

(opposite) Occasion, photo by  
m3architecture





MICHAEL CHRISTENSEN

.....there's a hole in the bucket - is this a problem? Certainly, if there is water in it and containment is required. But even if this were the case, there is an even bigger hole in the top, and the water will evaporate anyway. And the bucket could be knocked over so lets not panic about the hole just yet, and regardless, let's think about what the water is for, and how quickly it needs to be used and, by the way, is it actually water and.....

.....and perhaps the instability of a leaky bucket is desirable anyway. Perhaps it is not a problem if you know how and when to top it up and if the drips are used carefully. Perhaps the bucket can be placed and left to its own devices at times and be of great value, allowing other things to occur. Maybe there is something powerful about a vessel that offers useful containment and constant change simultaneously. If we can value the contained, and understand the speed of the leak, we can define what we might be able to do with it. No, no, this is not a problem, in fact perhaps we can patent this object and propose it for use as.....

.....as an analogy for the architectural profession, or an architectural practice or even an architectural project. Yes, the leaky bucket, perpetual instability, the need to be "carrying the can" at times, and "in it" at other times. The need to "stir the pot", or "put a lid on it" momentarily. The need to "jump in boots and all" from time to time. The need to put the "finger in the dyke" periodically, but not for too long or the water will be stale and.....

.....and then it would be a regular bucket, entirely useful but not as useful in this case as a leaky bucket. But maybe if we were to look more closely at the big hole in the top of the bucket we might be able to find.....

(opposite) Hole in the bucket,  
image by m3architecture



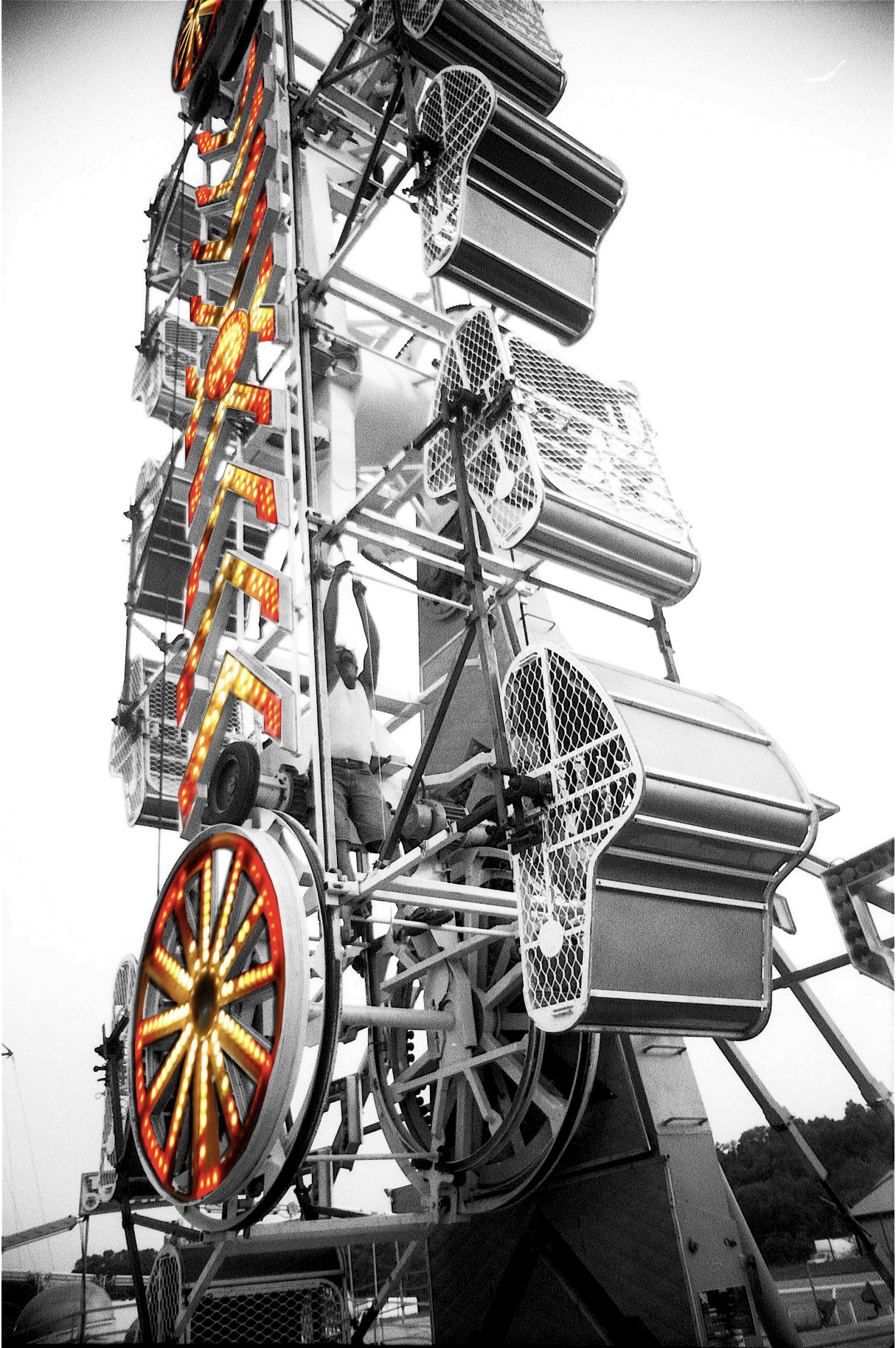


#### MICHAEL LAVERY

A gesture as simple as painting a line on a large blank wall can transform an inanimate object into a formidable opponent, transfigure an urban laneway into an arena for competition and transform friends into cheering members of a crowd. At a very basic level this kind of intervention seeks engagement between the individual and the built form. At a stroke this painted line suggests: possibility, latent opportunity, a challenge. As a gesture this elevates an understanding of the inanimate above the singular and the passive. (The wall is no longer just a wall.) There is a personal interest in the specific possibility suggested by the white line painted judiciously on a selected wall. The built form should actively participate in the various relationships that exist between user and object (built form).

(opposite) Inanimate object as  
active participant, image by  
m3architecture







#### BENJAMIN VIELLE

Early morning: the carny arrives at the show ground with his Zipper trailer in tow. Within 5 hours the carny raises the boom, assembles the cages and tests the ride. The Zipper is the tool of his trade, tailored to his mechanical skills. He understands and maintains every nut, bolt, and cable in the structure / machine. The efficiency of Joseph Brown's design is evident in the neatly packed semi-trailer which transforms into the base of the ride when assembled.

A few coloured lights attract the thrill seeker. You pay the carny and board the two person cage. A frugal safety device: the logical result of securing two bodies in seated position. Steel pipe, mesh and plate: the rough physicality of the cage adds to the fear of the occupant - all part of the experience. The ride starts up. It is at once scary and exhilarating - an intense experience beyond the everyday. The ride stops. The same ordinary cage and rudimentary machine that provided the thrill returns you to ground with brutal efficiency.

What if architecture was like the Zipper? A craft which is delicately balanced between, functionality for the carny and embellishment to support the experience of the thrill seeker. In practice it is a useful analogy, leading to solutions which can be explained rationally: using functional devices to support intense experiential concerns. This desired balance leads to a honing of craft which is focused on the primary architectural act.